

AROUND the FIRE

RESCUE THE EQUINE

Summer 2023

RESCUE the Equine ★ MENTOR the Child ★ HOPE for the Family ★ EMPOWER the Ministry

THE FREEDOM OF FORGIVENESS

By Sarah Robinett

I watched anger fill my young friend's eyes like a dark cloud.

Zoey was my sixteen year-old session girl for the day. In heated breaths, she vented her bitterness.

"My birth mom was so mean to me. Now that I'm adopted and have a new family, she's trying to be part of my life and pretend like nothing happened. It makes me so angry. She's NOT my mom . . . because a mom would *never* treat her kids the way she treated me!"

Together, we led one of our newer horses in training from the paddock. I could see my dear friend was hurting. Today wasn't the first time she had expressed her anger toward her biological mom. I felt as if I had already used up all my comforting advice to share. Instead of offering an answer, this time, I listened and prayed.

Zoey looked toward the hitching post where our chosen horse stood quietly tied—a beautiful tri-colored paint mare named "Freedom." Changing the subject, Zoey asked me, "What's Freedom's story?"

"Freedom came to us after being rescued from an unscrupulous breeding operation," I explained. "She is a homozygous Paint, which is a genetic phenomenon that almost guarantees she will pass on her astounding color pattern to her offspring. She carried six foals full term before she was nine-years-old."

Pointing to the sagging conformation of the mare's distended belly, I told Zoey, "Freedom was exploited because of her beauty . . . and used as a means to satisfy the greed of men at great cost to her life. Her body bears the marks of carrying too many babies, too young, too soon."

Zoey's face filled with empathy for the quiet mare. "That's so wrong!" she exclaimed. "I'm so glad she's safe now."

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Photo credit: @EmilyGreen

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**"WHEN WE
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Photo credit: @EmilyGreen

"Yes," I responded. "She's learning what it means to be loved—not for her appearance or what she can produce—but for who she is. Our mare is also an example of how walking in true freedom and healing means to *extend* that same love to others . . . like to you today."

Zoey smiled, acknowledging the quiet horse's willingness to be with her. We led Freedom the short distance to Sandy Pants Arena. I sat back and watched Zoey skillfully complete simple groundwork exercises with the mare. Once Freedom understood Zoey's communication from the ground of foundational trust and respect, she stood with patience and waited for her young companion to ascend the mounting block. Gently sitting on Freedom's back, Zoey softly directed the mare's footsteps.

Together, the two of them traced peaceful laps in the arena sand. Unsure of what I was seeing, I noticed an unspoken connection building between them. I continued to pray that Jesus would speak to Zoey and heal the broken places within her tender heart.

Months later, I received a message from a woman named Mariya, our contact at the Deschutes County Sheriff's office. She asked for assistance in transporting a horse for her from eastern Oregon to Bend. Without hesitation, our team agreed to pick up the horse a few days later.

The transport day quickly arrived and we left early in the morning for the four hour trip. Our small team climbed into the truck—Deirdre, our Equine Coordinator and two of my teenage session kids, Zoey and Carla. Both were teens I'd known since their childhood. Both were rescued out of abusive and broken families.

Once on the road, from the backseat of the truck, Deirdre and I could hear Zoey and Carla sharing their stories. As the two of them spoke, I listened to secrets about their pasts they had never voiced to me in person.

As the girls realized the similar experiences of their previous lives, a unique connection formed between them. Each spoke of how they walked alone to a food bank or a gas station to find something to eat for their neglected siblings. As toddlers, they were taught to smoke with their parents.

Each girl experienced how the devastating effects of addiction shattered their already fractured families. Each girl watched their mom open their home to harmful men with evil intent.

Both of Zoey and Carla's destroyed families left them as wards of the state in the foster care system. Yet, God's unstoppable redemption swept them up and firmly placed them—through official legal adoption—into families who loved Jesus. As their childhood memories resurfaced, the teenaged girls were old enough to realize the weight and horror of what they had experienced.

Yet, the most significant tie that bound them together—more than their pain—was the love of Christ. Miraculously, both girls had given their lives to Jesus and each saw Him answer impossible prayers.

A genuine relationship with Jesus changes everything. To know Him doesn't mean our past is entirely erased . . . but *redeemed*.

Listening to the conversation in the truck, I knew Jesus was working to bring their prior pain to light—for complete restoration.

Still driving together, we prayed. Deirdre and I commissioned the girls to take each painful memory to the foot of the cross . . . and ask Jesus to reveal what He wanted to show them in those moments.

The conversation changed as we pulled into the property of the horse in need of transport. A middle-aged woman stood at an open gate. While moving the truck through the opening, we noticed as she closed the gate behind us how her knees appeared very painful and she struggled to walk. A group of blanketed horses came to greet us—contained only by the perimeter fencing along the outside fringes of the small property. The horses were left to roam freely around the house and tattered outbuilding, which had been turned into a make-shift shelter.

The woman approached us and spoke of her plans to build more shelters, paddocks and corrals in order to care for more rescued horses. Sadly, her dreams were interrupted by tragedy. A few months earlier, her beloved husband unexpectedly died in her arms.

In a moment, her life began to crumble from every angle. Her own health was not good and she sacrificed daily to care for the needs of her animals. Without her husband, she was unable to finish the necessary structures to protect the horses from winter's fast approaching fury. She was simply trying to survive.

As she spoke, I noticed the horses munching hay from the ground and there was a partially full water trough nearby. Each seemed happy, friendly and an appropriate weight for their size. The horses were evidence of the woman's self-sacrifice to give them the best she had to offer. Surely, these were not the horses in need of transport . . .

Then, behind the buildings, I saw the mare.

She was hiding away from the group and devouring a leftover pile of hay. Even through her heavy blanket, we could see she was very thin.

The woman explained how the elderly mare had arrived from another horse rescue and that she simply didn't have the ability to feed her separately from the rest of the herd. Deirdre and I both empathized with her. Members of the Crystal Peaks horse herd were also aging, requiring extra feed and care to maintain their health. When horses advance in years, they often lose the ability to chew food properly and even when the most nutritious hay is offered, they cannot maintain a healthy weight. Many of our old horses must be fed separately and live primarily on a specific mash made to accommodate their worn-out teeth.

In compassionate humility, the woman made the right decision for the horse—to send her to a well-equipped facility where there would be provision for her unique needs.

We haltered the gray mare and led her to the horse trailer. When the door opened, she did not hesitate. She appeared to know the gift of freedom and healing that was being offered to her—and she quietly leapt inside.

Together, we circled to pray over the kind woman. Then, we quickly gathered back into the truck for the long ride home. That night, we dropped the horse off with our friend from the Sheriff's Department. The truck ride home was epic. Both Zoey and Carla revealed how God was mightily working in their hearts.

Before we said goodnight, Deirdre and I both prayed over the girls—especially for God to show them how He was redeeming and restoring every part of their past.

The following month, I received another contact from Mariya at the Sheriff's Department. The Deschutes County Sheriff's Rescue Ranch had a horse up for adoption and they thought it might be a good fit for our program. Again, our equine team loaded up into the Ranch's big black dually. And again, Zoey and Carla joined us.

On the way, I shared with the girls the information I'd received about the young horse. He arrived at the Sheriff's Ranch as a four year-old stallion who had suffered unimaginable pain. The bay colt once lived in a tiny barbwire enclosure. During an attempt to escape, he became entrapped in the sharp wire. Both sides of the young gelding's neck were severely lacerated in the struggle. The top of his hindquarters was also greatly damaged and the result was an enormous hematoma.

The grotesque swelling grew into a huge hump which gave him the appearance of a camel. For this reason, the Department lovingly nicknamed him, "Hamel." After three months of treatment at the

Sheriff's Rescue Ranch, the lump receded and left ripples of scar tissue along his body. I shared with the girls how Hamel's physical wounds were fully healed and he was ready for a new home . . . but his emotional trauma was still being revealed. My purpose for evaluating him was to see if his heart was ready and his mind willing to go through the training process necessary for complete restoration.



Photo credit: Deschutes County Sheriff's Department

"FINALLY, IN A DELIBERATE MOTION OF FAITH—THE FEARFUL HORSE REACHED OUT HIS NOSE TO TOUCH MY HAND."



Photo credit: @EmilyGreen



Photo credit: @EmilyGreen

When we arrived, Mariya greeted us warmly. She walked us over to the bay horse's paddock. We watched as he approached the fence with curiosity. After a brief introduction, I cautiously entered the pen. Upon my entrance, the young horse became unsure and ran away. He appeared to still be hiding in the fragile confines of his prior wounding.

For the next hour, I carefully approached the gelding and allowed him to move away when he felt unsure. Slowly, trust was built between us. Finally, in a deliberate motion of faith—the fearful horse reached out his nose to touch my hand. Moments later, he let me stroke the horrific scars along each side of his neck.

I smiled. That's what I was looking for. I wanted to see him choose to want to be with me *more* than he wanted to hide in his self-imposed prison of the past.

Allowing the simple touch to be our monumental breakthrough for the day, the Crystal Peaks crew loaded back into the truck. When we pulled out, I promised Mariya we would be back for another trial session with Hamel.

On the drive back to the Ranch, I explained to the girls how Hamel's choice to finally reach forward in trust was profound. Even though it didn't look like much on the outside—that tiny shift within his heart—became the exact point for healing to begin on the inside.

I could see my words about "heart change" struck a chord with Zoey.

"Guys!" she exclaimed. "Remember how I was so mad at my mom and you told me to pray? Well, I was praying the other day and felt led to pull Kim's book, 'Hope Rising,' off the shelf. As I was reading the stories of how God spoke to all these kids through horses, I remembered the session where I rode Freedom . . . and I realized . . . God was speaking to *me*."

The words couldn't come out of her mouth fast enough. Zoey drew a deep breath to continue.

"Sarah, I remembered how you said that Freedom was treated so badly by men who abused her. Even though all those bad things happened to her, I still loved her. And even though she has scars from her old life, I still think she's beautiful."

"Then God showed me how my mom was like that. She was also abused and mistreated. I realized how she treated me was like scars from her past. If I could think Freedom was beautiful after all she'd been through—then maybe I could choose to think of my mom as beautiful—after all *she'd* been through. When I realized this, I suddenly started crying."

"I cried and cried until I decided to forgive my mom and chose to love her like I love Freedom."

"All of a sudden, I felt all this blackness washing away from my heart. And then I thought of Freedom's name—and how that is what forgiveness is. When we forgive, we are literally *choosing freedom*."

Zoey radiated with overflowing joy. As I listened, I saw that—like the gray Arabian choosing to leap into the horse trailer and like a timid horse choosing to reach beyond his uncertainty and prior pain—Zoey was choosing to obediently reach for Jesus. With a deliberate act of faith, she chose to want Jesus more than she wanted to stay stuck in her painful self-imposed prison of her past.

Once the choice to forgive was made—in perfect compassion—Jesus was able to gently touch and restore the scars within her heart.

Friend, our uncertainty to step forward is sometimes the only fragile remaining lie of our past. The truth is this: forgiveness—and freedom—is only one deliberate step of faith away.

God's Word aligns forgiveness with the arrival of Jesus, the "rising sun" who will "shine on those living in darkness . . ." (Luke 1:77-79, NIV) When we choose to forgive, God's glorious light and presence replaces our blackness. In place of our sorrow and anger, His joy abounds.

Perhaps you have painful scars from your past hovering like a dark cloud over your heart. Like Zoey, we can all learn from the horse's examples and choose *trust* over hiding.

Today, will you choose to step into the radiant *freedom of forgiveness*?

"And you, my child, will be called a prophet of the Most High . . . to give his people the knowledge of salvation through the forgiveness of their sins, because of the tender mercy of our God, by which the rising sun will come to us from heaven to shine on those living in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the path of peace." (Luke 1:76-79, NIV)



Photo credit: @EmilyGreen

Jericho stood and looked at me with patient curiosity.

Tipping his head, he reached down to gently touch the object on the ground in front of him. At his feet was a saddle. He could not have known the bundle of leather beneath him was meant to rest on top of him.

For a horse to accept a saddle means to willingly allow a burden to be strapped to their back. When done in the right way, saddling is a reflection of humbly submitting to service. This is a precious partnership with a human that can ultimately lead to beautiful adventures between a horse and its rider.

When the small Arabian gelding first arrived at the Ranch, he was virtually untouchable.

Slowly, a foundation of loving relationship was built between us. Now, he trusted my presence, my touch and my leadership. I smiled as I watched him carefully explore the saddle pad with his mouth. Clearly, Jericho felt safe with this burden beneath him.

Yet, did he trust me enough to strap a saddle—a burden—on top of him? Slowly, I walked toward Jericho and stroked his side. With care, I placed the saddle pad softly onto his back. We had practiced this motion before, so he accepted the pad with ease. Then I drew up the lead rope under his belly, mimicking the cinch. Again, the motion was familiar to him from previous weeks of gentle repetition.

Finally, I lifted the saddle off the ground . . . and promptly walked away. Surprised, Jericho followed. He was taken a bit off guard to see the big object now raised into the air, but gained confidence as he watched me carry the saddle first.

When I was certain he was no longer startled by the saddle's raised position, I approached him and gently laid it upon his back. Before he could decide how he felt about it, I removed it and walked away again. In this manner, I repeatedly "saddled and unsaddled" the fledgling horse many times without expecting him to keep or carry the strange load.

After thorough and peaceful preparation, the pivotal moment came. Up to this point, I had not yet cinched

Joyful BURDENS

By Sarah Robinett



Photo credit: @EmilyGreen



the saddle to his back—which can be a surprise for a horse when they realize the object on them goes with them.

Sometimes at this stage of the learning process, a horse can react to the new feeling by bucking or bolting.

Indeed, the first step of faith is often the hardest. Keeping an eye on Jericho's trusting expression, I cautiously reached under his belly for the cinch. My hands quickly laced the latigo through the cinch's main D ring and gently tightened the straps. The moment the saddle was firmly fixed upon his back, I motioned for Jericho to back up and move out on a circle.

When Jericho took his first step, he instantly realized the saddle was attached to him—and he leapt sideways in fright. Old and familiar feelings of fear roared up from his past. Taking his eyes off me, he jumped backward, looking for a way of escape. Smiling, I laughed and encouraged him forward.

I knew Jericho was safe. I knew he was capable. I knew he was able to easily carry the saddle—he simply didn't know it yet. In those first seconds,

I believed in him more than he believed in himself. The uncertain gelding glanced back toward me as I cheered him onward. Blinking at my odd attitude of joy in such a perilous moment, Jericho obediently moved forward in an awkward circle. With each stride, his confidence grew. By the second lap around the circle, Jericho's attention returned to me and he moved out with easy freedom.

Within moments, the uncertain gelding began to mirror and soak in my peaceful enthusiasm. He learned I was right—he was safe in my presence. He was capable to fulfill my request and he had the ability to do more than he thought he could.

At the end of our session, Jericho virtually beamed with delight at his great achievement. An entirely new level of peace and confidence enveloped him. More than ever—resting in my presence and following my lead—was Jericho's sole focus.

Isn't that like a reflection of us and Jesus? Our Shepherd King has gone before us and carried our burdens. Jesus encourages every heart to, *"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light."* (Matthew 11:29-30, NIV)

Today, perhaps you feel doubt, fear or surprise at the burden you may be asked to carry. Remember the cross of Christ. He carried every burden first. And because of His redeeming love, He promises that His yoke is easy and light. When we walk in obedience to Jesus, we are held safely in His presence. Because of Him, we are capable of carrying each burden with joy. And He gives us the ability to do more than we think we can.

Jesus knows that willingly being saddled with His burden of love can lead us on adventures with Him that we never dreamed were possible. Like a good leader, He is joyously waiting for us to take our eyes off our doubts—and refocus on Him. He is cheering us forward and waiting for us to catch our stride in peaceful obedience.

When we choose to partner with Christ, He transforms our "scary" burdens . . . into His joyful burdens.

BEAUTIFUL SCARS

By Erin Powe

In the year 2006, model horses lined every available surface of my pink bedroom. Some pranced. Some reared. Some galloped. A few had spots or perfect white blazes. All were sleek and shiny. Not one of them carried scars.

February of this year, Sarah, Deirdre and I, along with a couple of Ranch friends, stared through metal round pen panels at the Deschutes County Rescue Ranch. Before us stood a battered little horse. He did not resemble the models I fawned over in childhood.

Young “Hamel” endured life in a small, barbed wire pen. His harsh treatment and attempt to escape his confinement resulted in lifelong scars. Jagged barbed wire left its mark, carving up both sides of his neck. Tufts of white hair belie the severe trauma to his back. He had previously flipped over a fence and the outcome was a massive hematoma, an enormous swelling across his rump. His face exhibited a terrifying field of strange lumps and depressions where his skull had been fractured.

The horse world might blame him for his wounds. Some might use the words, *“good for nothing.”* At the ripe age of five, in the eyes of many, “Hamel’s” future had been ruined. Who would want this forever-altered, broken, deformed horse?

I gazed into his wide eyes. I noticed his attentive ears. He was clearly wanting to please anyone who truly saw him. Something in me wanted to cry, for I am broken too.

My scars are not outwardly visible, but they are still deep. While my life has been good, I also have not escaped my childhood unscathed.

I grew up amongst the loud anger of a household in conflict. Albeit very different situations, this horse and I still struggle with our coping mechanisms. “Hamel” flinches too easily at human touch. I flinch too easily at words.

There are moments when insecurities and anxieties loom large in my perspective. I have a hard time seeing how I can get through them. The wounds of my past are not fully healed and there are still missing beams in the walls of my heart. Often I’ve pondered, who would accept me with such evident fears and weaknesses? And who would want “Hamel,” the horse with a swelling so grotesque that it was shaped like a camel hump?

Sarah entered the pen. The lumpy horse looked toward her with a shy, although earnest expression. He was frightened but eager to please. Sarah, after 90 minutes, was only able to touch his face and gently stroke him before we drove back home. I was surprised when she mentioned a return visit. Clearly, she was following God’s lead—and looking solely at his heart.

In our two consecutive visits, the horse made astounding leaps of progress, showing himself a willing and quick learner. He accepted a halter and on the first try, stepped right into a horse trailer! After much prayer and seeking God’s will for this little gelding’s life, Crystal Peaks decided to bring him home on a trial basis—giving him a new chance and a new name.

His name would no longer be one that described his scars or his disgrace. We would call him “Honor.” With His own life, God gives us a new name and a new chance when He saves us from our broken history of sin and shame.

“He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap, to make them sit with princes . . . Praise the Lord!” (Psalm 113:7-8, ESV). This scripture resonates deeply with our Redeemer’s work in Honor’s story. The scars that we carry with us in this world are no obstacle to the Good Shepherd.

Just as God chose Honor for redemption, He offers each of us an opportunity to come into His house—to dwell with Him for eternity. In His glory, He rejoices to save the lost sheep and bring them home.

Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 (NIV), that the deepest chasms in our souls can be our greatest strength in Jesus. It reads, *“‘My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ’s sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”*

In our humanity—our bruises, lumps and bumps—His grace is more than enough for us.

Sometimes, I don’t feel strong in His grace when the tears come because an old insecurity of mine was provoked. Yet, if these scars encourage me out of my self-sufficiency and bring me to Jesus’ feet, then they are an absolute gift.

As the psalmist cries out, *“My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.”* (Psalm 73:26, ESV)

Honor’s story mirrors that of my failing heart and I have met a never-failing Shepherd—whose delight is to redeem.

God has given me great compassion for Honor. And with it, He has used my wounds to help me acquire profound understanding for certain session kids. This revelation could’ve never happened through a perfect home and family.



Photo credits: @EmilyGreen

I pray that God will use Honor's story in this way—what we are tempted to see as “ugly”—will become His great and boundless beauty within. May Honor's wounded body point countless souls to the wholeness of Jesus Christ's love and redemption. This gelding's willing heart continues to teach me and gain my highest respect.

Since Honor's arrival on the Ranch, I've never seen a braver horse. With calm trust, he encounters obstacles that should be frightening. As Honor releases his fear for freedom, God continues to reveal his true playful spirit.

Just as Honor is growing—I too, am growing in my trust of the Lord. A spring for the soul is here for both of us.

We saddled Honor for the first time on a sunny March day in Sandy Pants arena. A small audience gathered on the benches to watch. After several minutes of showing him the saddle and pad, I hoisted the tack up onto his back and carefully tightened the cinch. Then, I sent him out on a circle. We all anticipated that he might run and buck. Instead, he moved along at a slow walk, completely unconcerned. His curious eyes accepted the bouncing gear with trust.

Honor has chosen to respond to trail obstacles, stairs and wind, and remain completely unshaken. He has blossomed from a shy seedling—jumping at a touch on that first day at the Rescue Ranch—into a confident and bright young sprout.

In fact, His spirit is unbroken. He is a wonder to us all and we continue to thank Jesus for such a special horse.

Last summer, I hiked up Black Crater trail into the heights of this wildfire-ravaged mountain. Among the charred stumps and barren slopes, the most resplendent pink and purple blossoms were bursting all alongside the path. As I ponder this, ‘those marvelous fireweed’ flowers are rustling even now in my own heart, a promise of hope.

The One who brings life out of death knows best how to re-write my own story . . . and your story.

Friend—though trials will come and try to break you—though the fires of this life will come to ravage you—I pray that the flowers of unshakeable faith in Him spring up from the ashes.

Then, you, Honor and I will sing the song of His steadfast love forever. Together, we will celebrate our beautiful scars. (Although, Honor's solo may sound more like a whinny).

“And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.”
(Romans 8:28, ESV)

“My life is but a weaving
Between my God and me.
I cannot choose the colors
He weaveth steadily.

Oft' times He weaveth sorrow;
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I the underside.

Not 'til the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Will God unroll the canvas
And reveal the reason why.

The dark threads are as needful
In the weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern He has planned

He knows, He loves, He cares;
Nothing this truth can dim.
He gives the very best to those
Who leave the choice to Him.”

Corrie ten Boom

All stories written in “Around the Fire” newsletter are true. Some of the names have been changed to protect individual privacy. “Around the Fire” newsletter stands on the Word of God. Multiple translations of the Holy Bible are used to assure clarity for our readership. Each author is afforded the right to choose the translation that best suits their submission.

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We're excited to share our most recent T-shirt design inspired by the Ranch ministry. It represents our horse herd running together side-by-side, in a family. The silhouette is emblazoned with PS:686 (which stands for Psalm 68:6—"God places the lonely in families . . .").

Jesus offers everyone the invitation to choose His gift of redemption. When we do, we're added into His "herd," His forever family. It is within this place that we truly discover what it means to love and be loved.

The unique style of PS:686 is designed to invite the question of what it signifies—and give the wearer the opportunity to share their own personal redemption story.

Please go to our website and check out our new products made from sheep's milk. We also have beautiful silver jewelry of the Cascade Mountain Range that declare, "Faith Moves Mountains."

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